



Texas Agricultural Experiment Station

THE TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

December 16, 2005

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Subject: USGS Award No. 02Crag0020

Dear Ms. O'Dwyer and Dr. Gogan,

I am writing in response to the enclosed letter from Richard A. Coleman, US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), concerning the subject award. Dr. Coleman made some requests and had some concerns about the handling of the grant. Since the award was made by the USGS, I would prefer to address these issues with you.

1. The subject award ended on September 30, 2003. The Sully's Hill samples were not received by our laboratory until December of 2003, well after the subject award ended. At the time the samples were received, Natalie Halbert had completed her dissertation, the work had been approved and filed in her dissertation, and she was not longer employed in the lab under the USGS grants. Before funding became available to analyze these samples they were unfortunately lost. However, Dr. Derr agreed to run the samples for evidence of domestic cattle hybridization with no further funding if the samples could be replaced, which they were in December 2004. These results were provided to the Service in March of 2005.
2. The 6mm blood card punch from the requested samples from the Ft. Niobrara herd is more than adequate for UC Davis to complete the studies of these samples for Dr. Mooring's NSF grant. This is a standard mechanism for transmitting blood DNA samples on FTA cards. The return of all unconsumed samples is not an option. The cooperative agreements between USGS and TAES require TAES to archive the samples. Returning all the unconsumed samples would put TAES into breach of its contracts with USGS.

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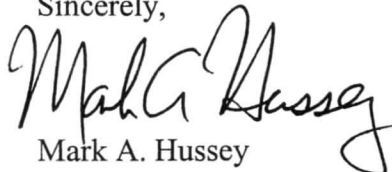
However, Dr. Derr has repeatedly expressed wiliness to provide up to one-half of the DNA samples to an appropriate DNA registry. This would allow TAES to meet the obligations of its agreements with USGS, provide a back-up resource should anything ever happen to the samples at TAES, and allow access by other scientists to the samples.

3. The raw data from the bison study has been provided to USGS and the Service on computer disks. A copy of the Halbert dissertation is on file at the Texas A&M University library and has also been provided to USGS and all Service bison refuges. These data are in a form that is usable by someone familiar with DNA work. However, we do need to point out that data and our analyses must not be used to simply identify and cull individual animals that have cattle genes. This study was intended to identify those herds that have evidence of hybridization. Using these data to identify and remove individual animals is a gross misuse of the information.
4. The Jackson herd was never identified as being included in the study. Drs. Derr and Halbert processed all useful samples from the Grand Teton area that were received prior to the end of the contract. That information is included in her dissertation, presentations and supplied computer disks. Any samples received after the end of the contract, September 30, 2003, are not included in the data.

Lastly, let me point out that all five (5) refuges and three (3) Service/USGS administrators received the complete genetic data and meta-data in September of 2005 as well as electronic copies of Dr. Halbert's dissertation in January 2004. We believe that Dr. Derr, Dr. Halbert and TAES lived up to their responsibilities and requirements under these cooperative agreements.

We appreciate all the support USGS has provided to this project. With your support Dr. Derr's research program has become internationally recognized in conservation genetics. We look forward to the next project and continued research in this area. Please let me know if we can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,



Mark A. Hussey
Associate Director

Enclosure

cc: Gerald Bratton
James Derr
Natalie Halbert
Diane Gilliland

Timeline for USGS Federal Bison Studies

Oct. '03 -- Natalie Halbert defended her dissertation and filed a final copy with TAMU.

Dec. 7, '03 -- Original Sully's Hill samples arrived (this was too late to be included in Natalie's work). We lost the samples.... New samples were resent December 2004. Mitochondrial and nuclear hybridization data provided to the Service in Denver on March 8, 2005. Final population genetics information is still pending.

Jan. 26, '04 -- TAES provided USGS with the final report (Natalie Halbert's dissertation) and also provided the final report to all refuges covered by our coop agreements (except for the Sully's Hills bison as these samples were not provided in the time line required for TAES to meet the deadline for the final report).

Dec. 10, '04 -- Jim Derr, TAES, began to work with M. Mooring (at a small university in San Diego) for additional genetic analysis (to determine parenting) of 294 of the samples from Fort Niobrara NWR for a project outside the scope of the coop agreements between TAES and USGS. Although the original plan was for these samples to be analyzed at TAES, J. Derr ultimately shipped 6mm punches from the original samples to T. Roffe, for transmission to UC, Davis, for analyses in the fall '05.

Sept. 30, '05 -- TAES provided the metadata and complete raw data in electronic form for all the Service refuge bison herds covered by the coop agreements.

March '05 -- Jim Derr spent a day in Denver with FWS personnel presenting and explaining the findings of the genetic studies from the FWS refuge bison herds funded through the USGS cooperative agreements.

June '05 -- Jim Derr spent 2 days in Ft. Collins, CO with National Park Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service and USGS personnel presenting and explaining the findings from these studies funded through the USGS and NPS cooperative agreements.

Multiple public presentations and peer reviewed publications have resulted from these studies describing the research, presenting data and explaining the significance of the results. Details of these activities are available from TAES.